

OLD DOBBIN

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by new men and new money, only changing to a gas car this time, and abandoning steam. I followed the new flag, and was advanced to almost the top of the salaried list, and was Mr. O'Donovan for fair. Poor Mr. Escott died,—just drooped and fell away as men so often do who have fought hard and lost,—and Mrs. Escott, she went away South, in very straitened circumstances, to stay with another married daughter in Charleston. I heard that Mrs. Livingstone had two little babies, and was living in splendid style in New York, with Mr. Livingstone at the top of the tree, very prominent and rich. Twice I came near marrying; for I was very lonely those days and often wished with all my heart that I had a wife and home of my own. But somehow I never could bring myself to it; there was always Stella's face rising between—and then goodbye to any wife or home for me!

I got into politics in a small but conspicuous way. The Irish had to come out. I guess; though in my case it was on the right side,—reform and all that. I was one of the Committee of Fifteen, and helped to run several rascals out of office, as well as clean up the town, which, like many small American cities, needed it worse than anyone can believe who hasn't dug into all such graft and rottenness. I became one of the trustees of the St. Ignatius Rectory, was on the Parole Board, and took a big share in the Lincoln Park project, with children's playgrounds and a band on Sundays.

BUT the turning point of everything was one day when George Hurd hopped on the same streetcar, with some papers under his arm, and cried out, "Just the man I was going to see!" George had altered considerably since the time his socks and get-up had hurt your eyes. He was now a prosperous real estate operator, dividing up acreage into lots, and was vice president of the Chamber of Commerce.

"Mike," he said, "you have to beg, borrow, or steal forty thousand dollars, and then we'll buy out Swan & Partridge's, share and share alike!"

Swan & Partridge were the auto lamp manufacturers, and very highly thought of in the trade, even at that time. It was one of those old houses that charged more for its product than anybody, and made up for the price in satisfaction. When a car was advertised as equipped with Swan & Partridge's side and search lights, the public knew it was getting about the best in the market. Some forty per cent. of the more expensive cars were put out with them.

George told me that old Mr. Partridge was in failing health, and that the doctors had ordered him to draw out quick; while the Swan interests, as represented by Mrs. Brownell and Mrs. Hilliard, had a foolish idea that the business would decline without the old fellow at the head. He was of the swollen, self-complacent kind who acted as though he had made every individual lamp himself, and if he looked out of the window I guess it was his impression that the whole factory stopped and held its breath till he turned round again.

George had all the figures with him; had gone over the books for the last ten years, when in the earlier part the firm's whole business had been for carriages, ships, launches, mines, and so on. It was certainly a big snap for men with money enough to swing the deal,—eighty thousand dollars cash, and two hundred thousand dollars to lie on mortgage at seven per cent. George said he had arranged about the mortgage all right, his father, who was well off, taking half, Mr. Partridge fifty thousand dollars, and the rest in five ten-thousand-dollar lots divided among several of his personal friends and real estate clients. It was that partner with forty thousand dollars cash he wanted, and a practical man that could be trusted to take hold and make things hum,—me, in fact, as he insisted most pressing.

But where was I to get forty thousand dollars? It was a staggering sum, and I thought George clean out of his wits when he said I could borrow it anywhere. Up to that time I guess ten dollars was the biggest loan I had ever negotiated, and I was always in a fever till I had paid it back the next day. It had been a matter of pride to me, remember, that I did not owe a dollar in the world, and met every bill plumb on the minute. Now to load up with forty thousand dollars—supposing I could raise such a sum—seemed too tremendous even to consider. But George gingered me up,—argued and expostulated and pleaded till I finally gave way as though it was more a favor to him than anything to my own advantage.

The upshot of it was that, after studying

the figures that night and confirming all George had said, I went next morning to the Second National Bank and asked Mr. Johns, with as much gumption as I could muster, for the loan of forty thousand dollars on nothing but my personal note.

And let me say right here that reputation is as much an asset as capital, and young men ought to take that to heart and realize it more than many of them do. Some of those tricky little deals that seem so smart at the time may queer a man for the rest of his days, and constantly rise up in judgment against him. The business world is run on trust, and "no others need apply." My talk with Mr. Johns didn't last ten minutes; yet I walked out of the Second National with forty thousand dollars added to my account. It was my record that did it,—the years and years I had been building up my credit.

The venture, in spite of all that interest to pay, was profitable from the start; and as the automobile industry continued to rise by leaps and bounds, Hurd & O'Donovan leaped and bounded too. We mounted with the flood, and were never bothered a minute to meet our calls; and, being always harmonious and in agreement, George and I stood shoulder to shoulder for the good of the business, with none of the bickering and faultfinding so common in many partnerships.

THIS brings me to my coming to New York on a visit and calling on Mrs. Livingstone. I was rigged out as a gentleman and beginning to feel a bit like one; but when the door opened and she entered the sitting room of her splendid apartment where I was waiting, and held out her hand so warm and cordial, I guess all the gentleman oozed right out of my toes, and I was just plain Mike again, trembling at the sound of my own voice, and with an awful lumpy feeling in my throat. The years had not changed her. If anything, she seemed more beautiful than I remembered; yet softened and more womanly, with a deeper light in her eyes and something in her voice that caught at my heart.

After awhile she brought in her oldest little girl to show me,—a pretty little tot of four or five, very wondering and silent at the sight of a stranger,—and after some coaxing I was allowed to take her on my lap, and put my big arm round her. This seemed to break the constraint I had felt so much at first, and we fell to talking naturally, just as we had in the old days at the hospital, and to laugh and become the friends we were before. I stayed quite a time, and finally when I rose to go she said:

"You've told me everything except the most important thing of all—her name, Mike."

"She hasn't any name," I answered, understanding what she meant. "People who don't exist don't have names."

"And are you never going to marry?" she asked.

I shook my head. "You know why," I blurted out, hardly realizing what I was saying. "It was all true on the little silver box."

She looked at me as though undecided whether to be offended or not; while I stood there, reddening to the ears, and wishing the floor would open and swallow me up. Then she smiled.

"Shadows are poor things to hold to," she said. "Shadows won't take care of you when you are sick, or keep you warm and comfortable as a good man ought to be. Get a good little wife, Mike, and leave it to her to chase them away. She'll do it."

"That's good advice," I said. "I've tried to follow it; but I can't."

At that she paused, holding to the lapel of my overcoat with her little white hand, and looking up in my face as a sister might to a brother who was going away for a long, long time.

"Just an old Dobbin," she said at last, very soft and quivering, "just a faithful, foolish, single-hearted old Dobbin! God bless you, Dobbin! There are none too many like you in this bitter world."

All the way back to my hotel I kept wondering what she meant. I thought Dobbin was a horse, and could not understand the allusion. It was only afterward I found out he was a character in an old book called "Vanity Fair." And then I didn't mind the name; for, though everybody laughed at him, and another man married the woman he loved, he was the only person in it who never did a mean thing or acted anything but noble and chivalrous. At Christmas, when I sent little Helen a lot of toys, I signed the card, "From Old Dobbin"; for the name sort of stuck in my head, and I was proud